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ON THE WORK OF THE COUNCIL ON PHARMACY AND CHEMISTRY OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION¹

AMONG the many reforms which have sprung up in the last few years and have grown in a modest way one may be mentioned which, while of great practical value to the public, has appealed first and directly to medical men only, and has therefore been generally overlooked by the people at large. To understand the genesis of this reform a few words of history will be necessary.

We do not have to go back very far to recall a time when a marvelous faith was placed in the power of drugs to cure or alleviate all manner of ills. Many of these drugs were of the crudest description, and were often extracts or tinctures of various barks, roots or leaves of somewhat uncertain composition, used alone or in combination with certain inorganic, and a few organic salts. The use of these things was an inheritance and also a development from older usages, going back to the *materia medica* of the disciples of Galen, on the one hand, or to the mineral chemistry of the followers of Paracelsus, on the other. In spite of the advance of knowledge the pharmacopœias of the nineteenth century contained a great deal of rubbish, the weeding out of which has been a difficult task.

In consequence, however, of the rapid advance of knowledge a gradual distrust of the value of the great majority of drugs, and indeed of drugs in general, began to appear among medical men. The situation was described as one of therapeutic nihil-

¹ A paper read before the Evanston Scientific Association, November 4, 1910.